

Christmas Eve and Christmas Day – Year C

Tuesday 24 and Wednesday 25 December 2024

The Faith Action Programme would like to thank Rev Dr Douglas Galbraith and ALTERnativity for the use of their archive material for Christmas Eve and Christmas Day.

Weekly Worship, based on the Revised Common Lectionary, is for everyone – in any capacity – who is involved in creating and leading worship.

It provides liturgical material that can be used for worship in all settings. Our writers are asked to share their approaches to creating and delivering this material to equip leaders with a greater confidence and ability to reflect on their own worship practice and experience and encourage them to consider how this material might be adapted for their own context.

We would encourage continual reflection on the changing patterns of worship and spiritual practice that are emerging from disruption and how this might help identify pathways towards development and worship renewal.

An archive of resources for daily worship can be found on the Sanctuary First website:
<https://www.sanctuaryfirst.org.uk/daily-worship>

We may not all be gathered in the same building, but at this time, when we need each other so much, we are invited to worship together, from where we are – knowing that God can hear us all and can blend even distant voices into one song of worship.

24-25 December 2018 – Rev Dr Douglas Galbraith archive material	3
24-25 December 2021 – <i>ALTER</i>nativity archive material.....	11
Musical suggestions	13
Reflecting on our worship practice	14
Useful links	15

24-25 December 2018 – Rev Dr Douglas Galbraith archive material

The lectionary provides three sets of readings, acknowledging that several services take place at Christmas. Any of these sets may be used, or a selection from all.

Christmas I

[Isaiah 9:2-7](#)

[Psalm 96](#)

[Titus 2:11-14](#)

[Luke 2:1-14, \(15-20\)](#)

Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God

Then shall all the trees of the forest sing for joy

Lives that are self-controlled, upright, and godly

I am bringing you good news of great joy

Christmas II

[Isaiah 62:6-12](#)

[Psalm 97](#)

[Titus 3:4-7](#)

[Luke 2: \(1-7\), 8-20](#)

See, your salvation comes

The towns of Judah rejoice

Justified by His grace we become heirs

Let us go now to Bethlehem

Christmas III

[Isaiah 52:7-10](#)

[Psalm 98](#)

[Hebrews 1:1-4, \(5-12\)](#)

[John 1:1-14](#)

The Lord has comforted His people

Let the floods clap their hands

In these last days He has spoken to us by a Son

The Word became flesh and lived among us

Sermon ideas

What brings you here?

The following may be presented as an address given by a single person, or with two voices: questioner and spokesperson. Alternatively, more than one voice could be used for the responding groups.

Introduction

A stable, an outhouse, a lean-to – the inn itself chock full of travellers. Best they could do. But this Bethlehem byre was soon full of people jostling to see the baby.

What brings you here? Who speaks for the Shepherds?

You know how it is on night shift. The rhythm of your job takes over, it's dark, it's peaceful, you can hardly see each other ... makes it easy to talk, spill what's on your mind to people you trust with no one overhearing. You share your problems, but also share your dreams without being laughed at. Things being what they are in our nation, we talked of crippling

taxes, never getting away from prying eyes, not sure if you'll be whisked off any minute to shore up another part of the Roman Empire. Someone mentioned the old talk of a Messiah, a leader to restore our independence, a leader like King David; needs a pinch of salt probably. But we Bethlehemites are proud of our special mention in the old Scriptures, which says the revolution starts here, in our town. The night was clear, we lay and gazed up at the sky, usual fashion, and it seemed to engulf us, as music does. The flocks seemed fine; we thought, let's go down to Bethlehem for a laugh (that's what we said, but I think we were serious). Because of the old Scriptures, people are always going there to have a look, and hoping they pick the right moment. But we got the jackpot! You might say it was history and habit that brought us here.

What brings you here? Who speaks for the Wise Men?

Just to set the record straight, we're really astrologers. The stars are our bread and butter. We have clients who want advice, advice about whether it is a good time to travel, whether they should give a field to a brother, whether they will recover from an illness, what are their chances of promotion, should they marry this woman they've met, or which of the interested men should a woman choose. To be quite honest with you, we have our methods and techniques and short-cuts, and we make the most of the mystique that surrounds such things. But beneath that, we still study the stars for our own interest, not just what they say, but what is behind them, what meaning there is. What do they say about the future for humankind as a whole? We argued about what the star of special brightness might be saying; one of us remembered Balaam's oracle (Numbers 24:15-24) where he talks of a star that will come out of Jacob, a new king for Israel who crushes their enemies. So we decided to take a sabbatical and follow it as it moved through the skies. So you might say it was our work and livelihood that brought us here.

What brings you here? Who speaks for the couple with the baby?

What choice did we have? We were ordered here. The Roman bureaucrats decided we were all over the place as a people, not organised enough. They wanted a census, maybe to calculate what they might get out of us. And how did they go about it? Where we lived there were people from all over. They could have come to us and made lists. But no: you had to go back to the town you were born in. No thought about what you might have to leave behind, how it might affect your livelihood, what it might cost to make the journey – and what if you are carrying a child? We couldn't afford much in the way of accommodation, but it's OK. At least it's shelter. You could say that it was the demands of living in society that brought us here.

And what brings you here, you who have come to this place tonight / this morning?

Is it, like the shepherds, to do with history and habit? The church of our youth, maybe we grew up in it, maybe we have stayed too. And the Christmas story too; remembered Christmases, family times, presents and excitement. Even though we haven't kept up with the church, we hear the broadcasts of carols, hear the singers, see the adverts! Somehow it reminds us of where we belong; it is reassuring and steadying in the storms of life, in the midst of never-ending change and uncertainty.

Is it, like the wise men, the work we do and the homes we make? It is not just people in repetitive jobs that dice with meaninglessness. The lawyer defending her 200th case of petty assault, the doctor faced with another case of anxiety, the painter stretching the ladder against yet another peeling house frontage. Do we sometimes question the value of our work or our parenting, its repetitiveness or frustrations, its wearying inevitability, the toll it takes of our feelings, the compromises we have to make, the relationships that sour, timetables ... schedules ... form-filling, deadlines, waiting lists? Like the wise men, do our tasks, our strategy-making, our investing, our managing, our doing what the company or the boss tells us even when we feel it is mistaken, or our attempts to follow the advice of this guru or that, or the recipes of this celebrity cook or the other, drive us to come looking for truth, meaning?

Or is it, like Mary and Joseph, just doing our civic duty, what society and family demand of us; pressures to think and live in certain ways; abiding by decisions of people we never see; trying to keep our individuality intact in the face of others' demands and rights; wishing for happiness while trying to keep others happy; decisions about who to vote for; wondering how to respond to need in our community, or make asylum-seekers welcome; events in the wider world that disturb us and make us feel powerless? And so we turn to the stable, to this simple story, simplicity in the middle of chaos, peace, beauty.

And will you get what you came for? Let the shepherds answer.

No, we did not. This was not what history had taught us to expect. The helplessness of the baby, the poor location, rough and ready Joseph no better than us, Mary like the girl next door. It just didn't match the Messiah-talk of centuries. We didn't get what we came for, something to admire, marvel at. But we got something else. A feeling of awe as if we were in a holy place, a feeling that the tangle of our lives could be sorted, a kind of nameless hope.

And will you get what you came for? Let the wise men answer.

No, we did not. We wanted everything explained, what our lives were for, what we were aiming at. We did not find any meaning that would turn us into gurus to whom everyone

came. Rather we were cured of looking for explanations. The star brought us to an encounter with humility, a giving and receiving, a peace we couldn't explain. We went home another way.

And will you get what you came for? Let Mary and Joseph answer.

No, we did not. Far from satisfying or escaping the demands of society, we were faced in the years that followed with a double dose of demands. To flee from a king, to be trolled by others because your child is a misfit, the cruel disappointment of being disowned by your eldest, or to see Him the victim of the mob and of a cruel death. Yet we grew with Him and lived by His words.

And will you get what you came for?

I hope you do get something of what you came for, but also something you didn't bargain for: something to hold on to, something steadying in this story at a time when the rocks are sent swirling down the river, something that reminds us who we are and where we belong. But I also hope you may go away also a little freer, a little less tied to habits of conduct and belief, which is what in the end gives rise to the conflicts of the world; and maybe go away having grown a little and ready to grow a little more with the child who grew to be a man, to be remade in his likeness; maybe go away having found some light on your lives from this stable door, a peace which can't be explained; maybe feel renewed by the simplicity and innocence of this new beginning, look with new eyes, have new demands made on us, and that this will be the saving of us and of our world.

Isn't that really why you have come?

Prayers

Call to worship

"Though darkness covers the earth and dark night the nations, the Lord shall shine upon you and over you shall his glory appear ... The Lord shall be your everlasting light, your God shall be your glory."

"I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is the Messiah, the Lord."

"Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us."

Setting the scene

On a night like this
in an ordinary little town
and among ordinary folk;
in a land under occupation
where threat of violence
dogged the lives of the people;
between one minute and the next
God touched the earth –
as so often in the past,
in blessing or in warning –
but this time God stayed,
seeking among humankind
those who would grow
with and through this beloved child
to become partners with God
in establishing the Kingdom that is to come.

**Glory to God in highest heaven,
and peace on earth to all God's people.**

From Opening Prayers: The ICEL Collects, Christmas Eve and Christmas Day:

God of Abraham and Sarah,
of David and his descendants,
unwearied is Your love for us
and steadfast Your covenant;
wonderful beyond words
is Your gift of the Saviour,
born of the Virgin Mary.
Count us among the people in whom you delight,
and by this night's marriage of earth and heaven
draw all generations into the embrace of Your love.

or

On this holy night
draw us into the mystery of Your love.
Join our voices with the heavenly host,

that we may sing Your glory on high.
Give us a place among the shepherds,
that we may find the one for whom we have waited,
Jesus Christ, Your Word made flesh.

or

Today, O God of light,
Your loving kindness dawns,
Your tender compassion shines upon us,
for in our Saviour, born of human flesh,
You reveal Your gracious gift
of our birth to life eternal.
Fill us with wonder on this holy day:
let us treasure in our hearts
what we have been told,
that our lives may proclaim
Your great and gentle mercy.

Intercessions

Almighty God, we praise You;
for You have wonderfully created
and yet more wonderfully restored
this world and its peoples
through Your Son Jesus Christ,
who humbled Himself to share our humanity.
Now there is no place
which is far from the love of God,
no person who is of less consequence than another,
no situation in which there is no hope.

As we worship with joy this season
and celebrate the coming of the promised Saviour,
we remember those for whom to worship
is a risk and a danger,
those for whom to meet with others
brings unwelcome attention,
the people of the churches of Syria, Iraq, Egypt, Pakistan,
and in other places where they are in a distrusted minority.

We pray also for other minority groups
of whatever persuasion or religion,
who treasure traditions or a culture
that is different from their fellow citizens.

We pray for those at this time
whom nation and place and culture
can no longer sustain:
when war destroys all that's familiar;
when hatred between clans and races
cause people to leave home and district;
when the greed of others
despoils the fields and the forests
and removes their livelihood.
So many, O Lord, roam the world,
seeking a place to rest.
We pray that frontiers will be opened,
and welcome may be offered
and that the generosity of nations will continue
in spite of the scale of the need.

May all of these know something of the love
that came down at Christmas,
bringing hope where hope is gone.
In Your good time, O Lord,
reveal to all the world
the light no darkness can extinguish.
We ask this through the same Jesus Christ our Lord,
Amen.

From Scots Worship: Advent, Christmas and Epiphany, David D Ogston

1
We welcome You, Jesus, child of God,
gift of joyfulness
in a world of bleakness.

We welcome You, Jesus, child of God,
gift of peace

in a violent world.

We welcome You, Jesus, child of God,
gift of hope
in a despairing world.

We welcome You, Jesus, child of God,
gift of wisdom
in a foolish world.

We welcome You, Jesus, child of God,
gift of justice
in a world of unfairness.

We welcome You, Jesus, child of God,
gift of forgiveness
in a guilty world.

We welcome You, Jesus, child of God,
gift of love
in a bitter world.

2

Homeless king in stable bare
Friendless king, our hearts prepare
To give You welcome everywhere.

Careless of honour, status, pride
You came as the one who dignified
The lowliest place we could provide.

Teach us Your secret: teach us to be
Ready to find You wherever we see
The poor and the lost and the refugee.

Benediction

May the joy of the angels,
the humility of the shepherds,
and the peace of the Christ-child

be God's gift to you and to all people
this Christmas, and always,
and the blessing of God almighty,
Father, Son and Holy Spirit,
be with you all, now and forever.

24-25 December 2021 – *ALTER*nativity archive material

*ALTER*nativity began in 1996 with a group of people who shared a discontent with the way they celebrated Christmas. We realised that many others agreed but didn't know what to do about it.

It began with simple ideas and little changes like choosing cards with care and buying some fairly traded gifts. With a little more confidence, we started taking the established traditions and giving them a twist.

We took a fresh look at the Christmas story. What did it mean that God had become a human being? We noticed again how ordinary – and yet extraordinary – the characters in the story are. And we asked, "How do we celebrate in a world where half of God's children are starving?"

It began with a belief in two concepts often hidden during Advent: Just God, Simply Christmas.

*ALTER*nativity worked with churches and communities to understand and simplify Christmas, with the aim of motivating individuals and groups to

- Resist the pressure to over-spend
- Respond to Mary's concern for the poor
- Re-ignite enthusiasm for great celebrations
- Rediscover the Christmas story

Welcome to the World – A stranger in a strange land

We invite you to watch the following 19-minute video presented by the Very Rev Dr Susan Brown, which includes a reading, prayer and music for a Christmas service.

<http://alti-advent.org.uk/resources/christmas-day>

Reflection

The video and reflection were created in 2020 when the world faced the COVID-19 pandemic. Many of us remember acutely the impact of the pandemic, while others still live in isolation due to other circumstances, not just the ongoing cost of living crisis. While it is helpful to reflect back on the lockdowns, and on how things were in those challenging times, perhaps this is a good time to wonder how have things changed. As we waited, and as we made difficult choices, God was there and hope was in the midst – where was God then and where is God in it all now?

Prayers

God of all people
as we wait again for the coming of Christmas Day
let us take time to be still,
and pause from the busyness of the season.

We remember a poor family travelling to Bethlehem, because they had to.
Of the search to find somewhere, anywhere, for Mary to give birth.
Of the joy at the safe arrival of Jesus, despite the insanitary conditions.
Of the visitors who came to pay their respects at the birth of God incarnate.

But we also remember the fear and anxiety that stalked Herod,
that made the Wise Men know that all was not well,
that put in place the decree to slaughter the young boys
that forced the Holy Family to flee.

God of all the years, tonight as we wait for Christmas,
we remember those who are still waiting,
for justice, for peace, for release.
Waiting to be seen, recognised and included.

And we remember the work of your Son,
to bring good news and proclaim a different way to live.
As we go into our Christmas celebrations,
let us do likewise.

Amen

Incarnate God,

born on Christmas Day
we welcome You again into our world
and into our lives.

Vulnerable God,
born as a baby to a poor family,
You came to revolutionise the world
through love, peace and justice.

Human God,
life's joys and sorrows were also yours,
be with those who mourn today
as well as with those whose hearts are light.

Reconciling God,
who holds the whole created order,
let us tread lightly on the earth
and treat each other with compassion.

Loving God,
who came that all may have life in all its fullness,
be with us your people
as we go out into our own Christmas celebrations today.

Amen

Musical suggestions

God Welcomes All (GWA) is the new supplement to Church Hymnary Fourth Edition. This exciting new collection features over 200 hymns and songs in a wide range of styles by writers from Scotland and around the world.

The full music version is now available; and the words-only book, digital resources including the expansion of the existing Church of Scotland music website, will be published in due course, with streaming functions and further information on each song; backing tracks; and lyric videos. *God Welcomes All* is available to order from

<https://chbookshop.hymnsam.co.uk/books/9781786225573/god-welcomes-all>

Our [online music resource](#) is on the Church of Scotland website; you can listen to samples of every song in the Church Hymnary 4th edition (CH4) and download a selection of

recordings for use in worship. You will also find playlists for this week and liturgical seasons and themes on the *Weekly Worship* and *Inspire Me* tabs.

You can find further musical suggestions for this week in a range of styles on the [Songs for Sunday blog](#) from Trinity College Glasgow.

- GWA 97 – “The daylight dims as the sun sinks low” – a profound song for a blue Christmas
- GWA 99 – “Joy has dawned upon the world” – a song of praise for Christmas
- GWA 100 – “You stepped down from heaven” – a Christmas song of adoration
- GWA 101 – “There is no child so small” – a challenge to us to think more deeply
- GWA 105 – “Christe, lux mundi”
- A suggested [playlist of songs from CH4](#) throughout Christmas can be found on the Church of Scotland website.

Reflecting on our worship practice

Since the start of the pandemic in 2020, the way we worship has changed and we need to reflect on the changing or newly established patterns that emerged and continue to emerge as a result of the disruption.

We can facilitate worship for all by exploring imaginative approaches to inclusion, participation and our use of technologies in ways that suit our contexts. This is not an exhaustive list, but some things we could consider are:

- Framing various parts of the worship service in accessible language to help worshippers understand the character and purpose of each part. This is essential for creating worship for all (intergenerational worship) that reflects your community of faith.
- Holding spaces for reflection and encouraging prayer to be articulated in verbal and non-verbal ways, individually and in online breakout rooms.
- In online formats the effective use of the chat function and microphone settings encourages active participation in prayer, e.g. saying the Lord’s Prayer together unmuted, in a moment of ‘holy chaos’.
- If singing in our congregations is restricted, we can worship corporately by using antiphonal psalm readings, creeds and participative prayers.

- Using music and the arts as part of the worship encourages the use of imagination in place of sung or spoken words.
- Use of silence, sensory and kinaesthetic practices allow for experience and expression beyond regular audio and visual mediums.

The following questions might help you develop a habit of reflecting on how we create and deliver content and its effectiveness and impact, and then applying what we learn to develop our practice.

- How inclusive was the worship?
Could the worship delivery and content be described as worship for all/
intergenerational? Was it sensitive to different “Spiritual Styles”?
- How was the balance between passive and active participation?
- How were people empowered to connect with or encounter God?
What helped this? What hindered this?
- How cohesive was the worship?
Did it function well as a whole?
How effective was each of the individual elements in fulfilling its purpose?
- How balanced was the worship?
What themes/topics/doctrines/areas of Christian life were included?
- How did the worship connect with your context/contemporary issues?
Was it relevant in the everyday lives of those attending and in the wider parish/
community?
How well did the worship connect with local and national issues?
How well did the worship connect with world events/issues?
- What have I learned that can help me next time I plan and deliver worship?

Useful links

God Welcomes All can be ordered from [Hymns Ancient & Modern](#)

You can listen to samples of every song in the Church Hymnary 4th edition (CH4) and download a selection of recordings for use in worship [here](#)

You can find an introduction to spiritual styles online [here](#)

You are free to download, project, print and circulate multiple copies of any of this material for use in worship services, bible studies, parish magazines, etc. If you would like to reproduce this material for commercial purposes, please contact the copyright holders, the Faith Action Programme, for permission: faithaction@churchofscotland.org.uk

Please note that the views expressed in these materials are those of the individual writer and not necessarily the official view of the Church of Scotland, which can be laid down only by the General Assembly.

©Faith Action Programme